

Civil Laws - To Obey or Not To Obey?

- I. The Bible commands us to submit to and obey civil government.
 1. Is there a limit to our submission?
 2. If so, how do we determine when to obey and when not to obey?
 3. In grey areas, how do we decide which laws to obey and which to disregard?
- II. Only God has ultimate authority; all other authority is limited.
 1. God is the sovereign ruler over all (**1Ch 29:11-12**).
 2. God will not give His glory to another (**Isa 48:11**).
 3. All power was given to Jesus Christ when he rose from the dead (**Mat 28:18**).
 - A. Power is authority.
 - B. Authority *n.* - 1. a. Power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command, or give an ultimate decision.
 - C. Therefore, all authority was given to Jesus.
 4. Jesus is the only potentate (**1Ti 6:15**).
 - A. Potentate *n.* - 1. A person endowed with independent power; a prince, monarch, ruler.
 - B. For a man to claim absolute authority over another person is for him to usurp the office of Jesus Christ.
- III. God requires us to obey principalities, powers, governors, and magistrates.
 1. God has ordained that there be powers, and that every person be subject unto them (**Rom 13:1**).
 - A. Power *n.* - II. As a person, body, or thing. 6. a. One who or that which is possessed of or exercises power, influence, or government; an influential or governing person, body, or thing; in early use, one in authority, a ruler, governor.
 - B. Subject *adj.* - I. 1. That is under the dominion or rule of a sovereign, or a conquering or ruling power; owing allegiance or obedience to a sovereign ruler or state, a temporal or spiritual lord, or other superior.
 - C. For us to resist legitimate government powers who are executing legitimate laws is for us to resist the ordinance of God (**Rom 13:2**).
 - D. This even includes paying taxes (**Rom 13:6-7**).
 - i. Tribute *n.* - 1. a. A tax or impost paid by one prince or state to another in acknowledgement of submission or as the price of peace, security, and protection; rent or homage paid in money or an equivalent by a subject to his sovereign or a vassal to his lord.
 - ii. The power to tax is also limited, as is all other power.
 - iii. If taxes are so high that a person can't provide for his family, then he must opt for the higher law and not pay them, or at least part of them (**1Ti 5:8**).
 - iv. Gideon is an example of this (**Jdg 6:3-6 c/w Jdg 6:11-12**).
 2. Christians are supposed to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake (**1Pe 2:13**).
 - A. *Every ordinance* is clearly a qualified *every*, as will be shown in the remainder of this study.
 - B. We should submit to legitimate civil government to silence foolish men who say that we are against government (**1Pe 2:15**).
 3. Christians are to be subject to principalities and powers, and obey magistrates (**Tit 3:1**).
 - A. Principality *n.* - 1. The quality, condition, or fact of being principal; chief place or rank; pre-eminence. Now rare. 2. The position, dignity, or dominion of a prince or

- chief ruler; sovereignty; supreme authority. 3. The sovereignty, rule, or government of the prince of a small or dependent state.
- B. Magistrate - 1. The office and dignity of a magistrate; magistracy. *Obs.* 2. A civil officer charged with the administration of the laws, a member of the executive government. chief magistrate, first magistrate: in a monarchy, the sovereign: in a republic, usually the president.
- C. This means we have to obey the president when he is executing legitimate laws.
4. We should render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's (**Mat 22:21**).

IV. The purpose of civil laws

1. The purpose of civil laws is to punish evil.
 - A. Governors are to punish evil doers and praise them that do well (**1Pe 2:13-14**).
 - B. Rulers are to be a terror to evil works, not good works (**Rom 13:3**).
 - C. Rulers are to execute wrath on them that do evil (**Rom 13:4**).
2. God's law determines what is good and evil.
 - A. God's law is good (**Rom 7:12; 1Ti 1:8**).
 - B. Anything that is opposed to God's law is evil (**2Ki 17:13**).
3. Therefore, we must obey every ordinance of man that forbids and punishes evil, as God defines it.
 - A. This would include laws against murder, theft, assault, extortion, rape, sodomy, breaking contracts, etc.
 - B. Christians would be also be obliged to obey civil laws against evil things that are "victimless crimes" such as fornication, sodomy, intoxication, and self-mutilation, but they would not necessarily have to be in support of the state making such laws if they thought those laws should be enforced within the local church.
4. Laws that do not punish evil or praise good are not legitimate laws and we are therefore not required by God's law to obey them.
 - A. If a law is punishing or forbidding something that is not evil, then it is not a legitimate law because it isn't performing the function for which God ordained civil law (**1Pe 2:14**).
 - i. We are to submit "unto governors, *as unto* them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers" (**1Pe 2:14**).
 - ii. As - 33. a. With prepositions, *as* has the general sense of *as far as, so far as*, and thus restricts or specially defines the reference of the preposition; e.g. *as against, as between, as anent, as concerning, as for, as to, as touching* (Fr. *quant à*), have all the sense of 'as it regards, so far as it concerns, with respect or reference to.'
 - iii. According to the definition of *as unto*, we must submit to governors *as far as* they are executing laws that punish evildoers.
 - iv. When they go beyond that, and exercise authority not delegated to them by God, we are not required to submit to them.
 - B. If a law is punishing or forbidding something that is good, then it is not a legitimate law because it is performing the opposite function for which God ordained civil law (**1Pe 2:14**).
 - C. If a government is praising evil and punishing good doers, then that government is illegitimate because it is doing the opposite of what God has ordained (**Rom 13:3-4**).

- D. If a government is a terror to good works and doesn't execute wrath on them that do evil, then that government is illegitimate because it is doing the opposite of what God has ordained (**Rom 13:3-4**).
 - E. If the government is framing mischief by a law (**Psa 94:20**), then that government is illegitimate and God is against it (**Psa 94:21-23**).
 - F. Governments that call good evil and evil good are cursed by God (**Isa 5:20**).
5. Examples of illegitimate and unjust laws
- A. Any law that requires someone to give a marriage license to two sodomites is an illegitimate law which must not be obeyed.
 - B. Any law that requires someone to participate in a sodomite wedding or participate in or condone sin in any way is an illegitimate law which must not be obeyed.
 - C. Any law or order that sanctions or allows the murder of innocent people such as abortion laws or military orders to kill people who are not aggressing against us are illegitimate and unjust laws which must be disobeyed.

V. We ought to obey God rather than men.

- 1. When a civil law comes into conflict with God's law, we must always obey God's law.
- 2. We ought to obey God rather than men (**Act 5:29; Act 4:19-20**).
 - A. When the government forbids us to do something God commands us, we must disobey the government.
 - B. When the government commands us to do something that God forbids, we must disobey the government.
- 3. We should render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's (**Mat 22:21**).
 - A. But not all things are Caesar's.
 - B. We must render unto God the things which are God's (**Mat 22:21**).
- 4. Examples of obeying God rather than men:
 - A. Daniel refused to obey the commandment of the king which said he could not pray to God (**Dan 6:7-10**).
 - B. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the idol that Nebuchadnezzar had made (**Dan 3:14-18**).
 - C. The Hebrew midwives refused the Pharaoh's order to kill the Hebrew babies (**Exo 1:17 c/w Heb 11:23**).
 - D. Esther broke the law by going in unto the king without being called (**Est 4:16**).

VI. What about laws that are not in direct conflict with God's law?

- 1. Are Christians obliged to obey every ordinance that a government or a bureaucrat dreams up?
 - A. What if a mayor decrees that every pedestrian must only low-crawl on the sidewalks in his town?
 - B. What if a state legislature passes a law that states that all citizens of the state must dye their hair black?
 - C. What if the president of the USA signs an executive order stating that every citizen must eat anchovies on Thursdays?
 - D. None of these laws directly conflict with the law of God; so does that mean that we would be required to submit to them? Obviously not.
 - i. These laws are not punishing evil and praising good, and are therefore not legitimate laws that have to be obeyed (see Section IV).

- ii. These laws would be totalitarian in nature and a lawmaker who enacted and enforced them would be usurping authority which is not his to wield.
- 2. Today in the United States of America, it is not humanly possible to submit ourselves to "every ordinance of man" (**1Pe 2:13**).
 - A. "According to the CCH Standard Federal Tax Reporter, as of 2013, it now takes 73,954 regular 8-1/2" x 11" sheets of paper to explain the complexity of the U.S. federal tax code!" ([Political Calculations](#), 2-13-2013)
 - B. "According to CNS News, there are now 169,301 pages in the Code of Federal Regulations, which is double the number of pages in 1975. " ([Breitbart](#), 9-11-2012)
 - C. If a man spent one hour per day reading just the U.S. Federal tax code and the Code of Federal Regulations, assuming it takes one minute to read one page, it would take 11.1 years to read them (243,255 pages / 60 minutes / 365 days).
 - D. This doesn't even include all the international, state, county, local, and municipal laws.
 - E. Keeping every jot and tittle of every law in the USA in 2015 is obviously not what Peter had in mind when he penned this commandment.
- 3. Sometimes it is permissible to disobey civil laws.
 - A. Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the government (**Jdg 6:11-12**).
 - B. Paul evaded government thugs who were trying to capture him unjustly (**2Co 11:32-33**).
- 4. Sometimes laws should be obeyed for convenience or expediency.
 - A. Jesus paid taxes so the government would not be offended (**Mat 17:24-27**).
 - B. We should obey legitimate government laws for the Lord's sake and conscience sake, not for the government's sake (**1Pe 2:13; Rom 13:5**).
- 5. Specific examples of laws which do not directly conflict with the word of God, but we are still not obligated to obey:
 - A. Laws forbidding gun or gold ownership:
 - i. Are Christians obliged by the law of God to turn in their guns if a bureaucrat says they have to?
 - a. This ordinance would not be forbidding us from doing something God commands since He didn't directly command us to own a gun.
 - b. But God does affirm our right to self defense (**Luk 22:36; Luk 11:21**).
 - c. A bureaucrat has no right to tell someone else what they can or cannot own, and to do so, he would be usurping authority that belongs only God.
 - d. Owning a gun is not inherently evil, so therefore the bureaucrat is not acting as God's minister by punishing that act (**Rom 13:4**).
 - e. Therefore, Christians are not obligated by God to obey such an ordinance of man.
 - ii. Furthermore, for a bureaucrat to enact a law which confiscated guns would be for him to break at least two of God's laws by doing so:
 - a. "Thou shalt not steal" (**Rom 13:9**).
 - b. Extortioners shall not inherit the kingdom of God (**1Co 6:10**).
 - c. Extortion *n.* - 1. The action or practice of extorting or wresting anything, esp. money, from a person by force or by undue exercise of authority or power; an instance of this; an act of illegal exaction.

- iii. The same principle would apply to laws forbidding owning precious metals.
- B. Speed limit laws
- i. There is nothing inherently evil about traveling 56 MPH on a public road for which one's tax dollars paid.
 - ii. If a bureaucrat prints a sign that says 55 MPH and has a government worker drive it into the ground along the road, does that automatically make traveling at 56 MPH an evil and morally reprehensible act?
 - a. If posting a sign makes an act evil, then a bureaucrat posting a sign which says "thou shalt not smile" makes smiling evil.
 - b. Passing a law forbidding something that is not evil doesn't make it evil.
 - iii. What if a bureaucrat decided that in the interest of public safety the speed limit shall be 1 MPH on all interstates?
 - a. Would we be obliged by God to obey that ordinance?
 - b. If not, then why would we be obliged to obey another arbitrary speed limit imposed by the whim of a bureaucrat?
 - iv. Does a law that says "thou shalt not travel more than 55 MPH on this highway" fit the criteria for an ordinance of man that must be obeyed?
 - a. In that there is nothing inherently evil about traveling at a speed of 56 MPH, a governor would not be punishing evildoers (**1Pe 2:13-14**) or being a terror to evil works (**Rom 13:3**) by punishing people for disobeying this law.
 - b. In that there is nothing inherently evil about traveling at a speed of 56 MPH, we are not obliged to be afraid to do it because it is not evil (**Rom 13:4**).
 - c. Our conscience should not condemn us for doing something that is not evil, but if it does, then we should obey the law so that we do not violate our conscience (**Rom 13:5**), which would be a sin (**Rom 14:14,23**).
 - v. There is a point at which it would become dangerous to oneself and others to travel beyond a certain speed, and to do so would be foolish, which the law of God would then forbid.
 - vi. This is a grey area, and it is therefore up to every man's conscience and common sense to decide what that speed is and to stay under it.
 - vii. It is wise to obey many laws for expedience sake (**1Co 10:23**). Ask yourself:
 - a. Is it wise to put yourself and others at a higher risk for injury if you drive 10 MPH over the speed limit?
 - b. Is it worth your time to get pulled over and have to deal with the police?
 - c. Is it worth paying an expensive fine and higher insurance premiums for speeding?
 - d. Do you want to give the government more revenue by your speeding ticket that they will use to further oppress you?
 - viii. The same principle can be applied to "crimes" such as jay walking, not licensing an animal, selling lemonade on your lawn without a license, etc.
6. In these grey areas, a person's conscience will have to be their guide.